



## ABSTRACT AND BIOGRAPHY

### **Finding Near-Misses Can Improve Managers\* Learning**

After the Shuttle *Columbia* catastrophe, the Columbia Accident Investigation Board (CAIB) stated that NASA needed to learn from past failures by understanding the technical and organizational causes of the mistakes. While many organizations subsequently learn from such highly visible failures, most opportunities for learning may actually be in the form of "near-miss events" (i.e., situations where a failure could have occurred but random chance fortunately intervenes). Too often, however, near-misses are categorized as successes, suggesting obvious barriers to learning. This discussion examines factors that may increase people's awareness that near-misses can serve as warning signals presaging future problems.

**Robin Dillon**  
***Assistant Professor***  
**Georgetown University**

Professor Robin L. Dillon-Merrill is an Associate Professor in the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University. Professor Dillon-Merrill seeks to understand and explain how and why people make the decisions that they do under conditions of uncertainty and risk. This research specifically examines critical decisions that people have made following near-miss events in situations with severe outcomes (i.e., hurricane evacuation, NASA mission management, etc.). Her past research in risk has included supporting the Department of Energy's selection of a new tritium supply facility, aiding NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in decision making for the Mars Exploration Program, and developing a quantitative decision support tool for the management of software project resources based on an analysis of both the information system and the design. She has received research funding from the National Science Foundation, NASA, and the Department of Defense. She has served as a risk analysis and project management expert on several National Academies Committees including the Review of the New Orleans Regional Hurricane Protection Projects. From 1993-1995, she worked as a Systems Engineer for Fluor Daniel, Inc. She has a B.S./M.S. from the University of Virginia in Systems Engineering and a Ph.D. from Stanford University.

**Catherine Tinsley**  
***Professor***  
**Georgetown University**

Catherine H. Tinsley is an Associate Professor at the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University, and is the Executive Director of the Georgetown University Women's Leadership Initiative. Professor Tinsley is a faculty affiliate at the Center for Peace and Securities Studies, a Zaeslin fellow at the college of Law and Economics, University of Basel, and a CPMR fellow for NASA. She studies how factors such as culture, reputations, and negotiator mobility influence negotiations, as well as how near miss events bias people's decisions under risk. She has published in numerous peer-



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reviewed journals and has been on the editorial board of *The Academy of Management Journal*, *International Negotiations: A Journal of Theory and Practice*, and *International Journal of Conflict Management*.

**Dr. Edward Rogers**  
**Chief Knowledge Officer**  
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Dr. Edward Rogers is currently the Chief Knowledge Officer at Goddard Space Flight Center. He has run the Knowledge Management Office at GSFC since 2003, where he set the course for Goddard's learning initiatives through the "Goddard Plan for a Learning Organization."

Some of the knowledge sharing activities he initiated include the popular Road to Mission Success Course, the Pause and Learn process, and case studies. Part of Dr. Rogers' responsibility is to support Goddard projects through enhancing individual and team learning to improve mission success.

Dr. Rogers received a Ph.D. from Cornell University's School of Industrial and Labor Relations focusing on the role of cooperation in high tech firms. In the early 1980s he performed five years of international relief work in Southern Lebanon. Prior to returning to academic work at Cornell, Dr. Rogers operated a private consulting business focused on knowledge workers and intelligent enterprise. His research work applies game theory models to human behavior in organizations. He has consulted with a number of organizations on building conceptual transparency and leveraging collective knowledge.

Before joining NASA he taught strategic management and entrepreneurship in the College of Administrative Science at the University of Alabama in Huntsville where he was known for his practical application of business knowledge.